DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 843 FL 024 512

AUTHOR	Kim, Anna Charr
TITLE	Socio-affective Factors in Second Language Acquisition.
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Acculturation; Case Studies; College Students; Foreign Countries; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; Music Education; Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; *Student Adjustment; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Ukrainians

ABSTRACT

The case study of a Ukrainian university student in the United States investigated factors in the student's adjustment to the United States and acquisition of English as a second language. The student, aged 20, came to the United States to study music after being denied admission to a Russian conservatory because of his ethnic background, and had not previously studied English. Data were drawn from error and content analysis of all compositions written in English since arriving at the university, extensive recorded interviews, and administration of a language attitude survey given routinely to other students. Results indicate this student had a higher expectation for language learning than many of his peers, estimating his ability lower but also readily acknowledging progress. He considered English language learning to be an art rather than a burden, and used contrastive methods to learn English and improve writing and reading skills in both languages. His reasons for learning English were integrative rather than instrumental. The student became close to American friends and mentors. He found that a perfectionist temperament affected his academic work and communication. Affective elements apparent in his compositions included euphoria, nostalgia, anomie, and alienation, corresponding to theorized stages of acculturation. Contains seven references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

SOCIO/AFF

ED 407 843

Socio-affective Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Dr. Anna Charr Kim

170 W. King Lane

Des Plaines, IL 60016

847 296 2579

National-Louis University

847 475 1100 X2357

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FL024512

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Anna Kim

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

According to theorists such as Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Brown (1987), second language acquisition is but one part of becoming assimilated into a new culture. In fact, the degree to which an individual assimilates will determine how successful the second language student will be. However, many socio-affective factors are involved in entering a new culture. These stages of assimilation have been determined and are considered necessary for successful second language acquisition.

My study involved analyzing interviews and compositions by my case study subject, a college student from Ukraine, over two years. I concluded from these analyses that he had successfully passed through these stages as he was acquiring his second language.

Socio-Affective Factors in Second Language Development

My research was aimed at giving a qualitative perspective to the writing development of a Russian student over the course of two years by investigating the influence of cultural factors in second language acquisition.

Literature review

Acculturation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) regarded the question of learner orientation and the process of becoming or not becoming acculturated to the target language culture as central to research concerning factors in second language acquisition.

Schumann (1978) concurred by emphasizing acculturation as being the major causal variable in second language acquisition. In fact, according to Schumann, second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which the learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the target language. The learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates.

Social Distance

Social distance is a theory which places any learner on a

continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity with speakers of the target language (Schumann, 1976). While actual social distance is difficult to measure, it is the perception of social distance which will prevent acculturation into a second language and culture (Day, 1982).

Various integration strategies are also postulated by Schumann (1976). If the second language group "assimilates," it gives up its own life style and values and adopts those of the target language group. However, if the second language group is "cohesive" or chooses "preservation," it maintains its own life style and rejects those of the target language group.

Affective Variables

Among Schumann's (1978) affective variables which relate to language learning by individuals are 1) language shock, 2) culture shock, 3) motivation and 4) assimilation. "Language shock" affects adults more than children when they are learning a second language, since adults are more likely to fear criticism and ridicule, while children see language as a method of play. Adults also fear that their words may not actually reflect their ideas as accurately as they intend.

"Culture shock" results from the anxiety and disorientation an individual experiences upon entering a new culture (Schumann, 1978). The learner becomes dependent and his/her coping

strategies may no longer work. This mental state can even produce rejection of self, culture and the people of the host country.

Another affective factor, motivation, involves the reasons people give for acquiring a second language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) have identified two motivations: 1) integrative and 2) instrumental. An instrumentally-oriented learner is one who has little interest in the people who speak the target language, but want to learn the language for more utilitarian reasons, such as improving one's career. On the other hand, an integratively-oriented learner wants to learn the language in order to become like speakers of the target language.

Methodology

I chose a twenty-year-old Ukrainian college student named Sasha who was highly motivated and articulate for my case study subject. Although he is Jewish, Sasha had been a music student and a choir director in several Russian Orthodox and Christian churches. Because Sasha had been denied entrance into Moscow Conservatory due to his ethnicity, he and his family emigrated to the United States as political refugees to continue his music career here.

Sasha had never studied English while in Ukraine. Everything he learned was from the Language Institute of National-Louis University where he was enrolled for the complete

five level sequence of English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. I met him when he became a music tutor under my supervision.

As Sasha had saved every composition he had written in English, I analyzed all of them for errors as well as for content. I also interviewed Sasha extensively and analyzed the transcripts I made from the tapes. Finally, I administered to Sasha the same questionnaire that I had given to several post-Level V classes about their attitudes toward learning a second language.

Results

Attitudes

When it came to his attitudes, Sasha had a higher expectation for his second language acquisition than many of his peers. He tended to place his abilities lower than did his peers, but when he felt he had mastered an area he was definite in acknowledging that he no longer had problems with it.

My subject was also different from his peers in that he considered learning English to be an art rather than a burden. He actually loved learning the mechanics of the English language, as can be seen in one of his later compositions:

> This tendency for the grammar, the meaning, to have the shortest way to saying the same thing, the easiest way to say something, the most understandable, the most logical.
> ...This mix of American tendency to make everything as

> short as possible to make it more attractive, not dry, this is what I would like to improve in my Russian [after] having the experience of learning English.

As is the case with most second language students, my subject has compared the rhetorical styles of his native and second languages, employing contrastive rhetoric. Not only was he willing to adapt his English writing into the concise and accurate style of other writers of English, but he wished to change his Russian writing into a similar style as well.

This change in attitude also applied to his second language reading. It appeared that my subject was not fully able to appreciate what he had previously read in Russia, saying:

> "I couldn't understand it in Russian; about souls. So strange, so long. And I have to read it [now]. I like to read Pushkin, to read stories. Not I can appreciate the way it's written and enjoy it; maybe much more than the story [itself].
>
> This is what I would like to go, to feel as I am beginning to feel American. What they are, to feel how they are, to project, talking about literature."

Brown (1987) noted that second language learning involves the acquisition of a second identity. My subject also expressed the desire to reconstruct himself completely into a new man--a personification of art. Since my subject had indicated that he planned to "stay forever" in this country, it would appear then that my subject was willing to become assimilated into a new culture and language.

Like Schumann (1978), my subject understood that learning

the language was only one aspect of learning a culture, but he hoped in this way he would better understand the people who had created this language. His motives for learning English then appeared to be more integrative than instrumental.

Social distance

Because as a Jew, my case study subject was not allowed to participate in religious activities in his native Ukraine, he now appears to have little interest in Jewish religious groups except for an occasional singing engagement at a temple. As his mentors and friends are primarily Americans, social distance from members of the target language, English, is small and may help to account for my subject's growing fluency in the English language.

Affective filter

Krashen (1983) had postulated that someone who had high self-confidence and motivation would be less likely to be influenced by anxiety or the affective filter. Nevertheless, despite his high confidence and motivation, at one stage of his writing development (Level V), my subject was unwilling or unable to write a single assigned essay and received a 'No Credit' for that course.

At first I assumed that this was the result of an undue emphasis on correctness and grammar by his second language

instructors. With so much to be done, many ESL composition courses have stressed the acquisition of the rule-governed forms of the second language (Elbow, 1973).

However, when I interviewed my subject, he attributed his perfectionism more to his temperament than to the instruction he received. Having chosen music as a career because of its perfection, my subject believed it was necessary to be perfect in all things, including his written work.

Process of Acculturation

Since Schumann (1978) had divided the process of acculturation itself into four stages: 1) euphoria, 2) culture shock, 3) culture stress and 4) assimilation or adaptation to the second culture, I used my subject's compositions, interviews, questionnaires and my own observations to determine if such stages had been evident during his second language acquisition.

It is possible that my subject was experiencing the euphoria one encounters in a new culture when he attempted to write his very first composition in English entitled "Classmate." Imitating a street reporter, his sentences were staccato short.

> Michigan Ave., building number 18, third floor, and over one minute I'm in the classroom.

However, he was discouraged from such creative writing by his instructor who only wanted him to demonstrate the grammatical structures learned in class.

Nostalgia was also evident in a Level I composition entitled "Zhanna," which ended in the following way:

> She with my friend Lena sent me a letter for my birthday with the words: "You are always with us!" I often read these words and sometimes cry.

By the following summer, homesickness and culture shock were more apparent in a Level II composition, "Hometown," which he later chose as one of his favorite compositions:

> I miss my city, my lovely friends, my wonderful teachers; streets of my city - places, where I like to spend my time, and my home town neighborhood, where I grew up and spent my youth.

In a retrospective interview about this composition, my subject reported that "I was feeling nostalgic; it was written during the summer--a golden time of life. I felt the loss of a dream and the coming of reality." Fortunately, this second stage is postulated by Schumann to be the period when second language acquisition is optimal.

"Anomie" was used by Lambert (1967) to describe the feeling of homelessness that a student has when he feels neither bound to his home language or the new one. In fact, the feeling of anomie is strongest when the individual linguistically begins to master the second language. According to Brown (1987), this feeling coincides with the beginning of the third stage of acculturation, culture stress.

A Level III composition, "Dear Helen," illustrates this feeling of anomie quite poignantly:

> Just yesterday I had a dream. I saw all our company. I also dreamed about our trips to Moscow and Odessa. There were lots of pictures from the past in front of my eyes and I was crying about my native land, my friends who are so far from me, my home town, and streets which are so native. Just only here I'm beginning to feel and understand what I lost, and my wish to return for studying gets stronger every day.

Culture shock usually occurs about six months after entering a new culture when the second language learner begins to compare the values and patterns of the new country with those of his native country (Schumann). The learner, realizing that he will not be returning to his native country, feels the sense of loss to a greater degree than if he was only away from his native country temporarily, such as a foreign student might.

Clarke (1976) and Bateson (1972) have reported on the schizophrenic nature of second language and second culture learning. Day (1981) described the intensity and the amount of effort and energy expended by an individual learning a new language and culture in order to keep communication from breaking down over the simplest item.

A real sense of alienation is evident in a level IV composition, "My most important decision:"

> There is an opinion among immigrants that the most valuable thing for us is moral support, not even financial support, but simply encouragment [sic]...I simply needed someone to believe in me, but I was alone. At first, I felt lonely, which, by the way, was the cause of depression.

It is this intense nature or period of culture shock that becomes the critical time the learner must pass through successfully. According to Schumann (1976a) there must be sufficient pressure to learn the second language completely before pidginization and/or fossilization can take place.

Two years after his arrival, signs of assimilation began to appear in "Final Exam II" (Level VII) in the Spring of 1995:

> Another example of how my American bosses have had a good influence on me is Mr. H., a very talented musician.... My boss took care of a newcomer and has been mentoring me for all this time....We newcomers, often like to generalize that Americans are cold and uncaring about others, but these experiences of mine just prove the opposit [sic].

It was apparent from this composition that my subject had entered a new stage of acculturation. His second language acquisition probably has been influenced by the socio-affective factors in his life, so that it reflects the degree to which he has been assimilated. The questionnaires, the interviews, and the content of the compositions can be viewed as signposts along the road of acculturation and successful second language acquisition.

Be that as it may, Sasha was not the ideal second language learner who is described as someone who is not afraid of assuming a child-role in language learning. He was inhibited in his attempts to utilize the English language when writing and was concerned with making perfect responses. The ideal second langauge learner will allow him/herself the opportunity of making

mistakes and realize that progress will come in spurts.

Despite his initial impulse to produce only perfect final written products, Sasha was eventually able to lower his high expectations for himself and meet the requirements for in-class writing. Had the instructors separated grammar instruction from the writing process and allow for more creative writing, how much more and with less anxiety might Sasha have been able to produce? This question affords a rich area for further research.

Implications

Instructors at the college level with second language students in their classrooms should be aware of the cultural and language stresses that they are undergoing. Exhibiting patience and sensivity to their problems in assimilating will help the student pass successfully through each stage. Knowing that the stages that are most agonizing also appear to be the most critical and necessary for acquiring a second language and culture will make the task more rewarding for both second language college student and instructor alike.

References

Brown, D. (1987). Principles of language learning and teaching. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Day, C. (1982). The optimal distance model of acculturation and success in second language learning. Dissertation: University of Illinois.

Elbow, P. (1985). The shifting relationship between speech and writing. College composition and communication, 36, 283-303.

Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W. E. (1972). Attitudes and motivation in second language learning. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Pubs.

Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. N.Y.: Pergamon.

Schumann, J. H. (1976). Social distance as a factor in second language acquisition. Language Learning 26: 135-143.

Schumann, J. H. (1978). The acculturation model for second language acquisition. In R. Gingras (Ed.) Second-language acquisition and foreign language teaching, 27-50. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics.